



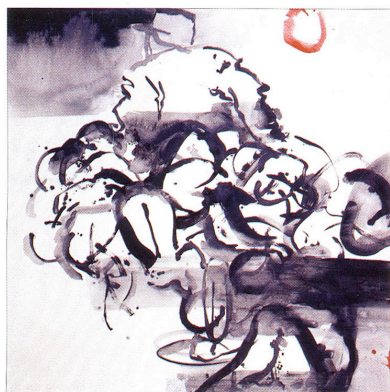
Encountering an Oliver Jackson oil painting for the first time is like being bathed in a sumptuous sea of colors. Its monumental effect and sheer scale transport the viewer into a swirling luminosity of passionate blues, reds, purples, browns, golds, ochres, yellows, and ephemeral pinks and grays. When you have seen a work of art by Oliver Jackson, as my mama would say, "You have seen something!"

Born below Jefferson in downtown St. Louis, Missouri, in 1935, Oliver Jackson has always been a "maker" of things, a word that he prefers to the commonly used term, "artist." Whether he's making oil on canvas, graphite on paper, collage, mixed media three-dimensional works, or sculpting glorious marble, Jackson applies a rigorous aesthetic honed by the same type of discipline he observed in the approach of great musicians he heard in his youth—Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk. He has mastered the ability of imbuing his works with a similar power to effect change in the state of being of the viewer. "I became aware of their approach to making something," he said. "They tended to do it in a way that seemed to be part of who they were and not some artificial formula. So I began to understand how I should approach making the very first mark, and it wasn't so much as the first the mark

itself, but your attitude about making it, the directness of it all. And directness is personal. To be direct is to be yourself and to be yourself is to know yourself. And I began to understand myself as a maker, what I prefer. Do I like to enter the space of a canvas this way more than that way?" He also learned in his youth about the effects art can have on the viewer from the Renaissance painters like Rembrandt, Zubaran, El Greco, and Allesandro Strozzi, whose works he first saw in the St. Louis Art Museum. "They really fascinated me. I was intrigued by the compositional harmony. The effects were grand, and the paintings were impressive in their ability to feel as though they were in your space. I wanted to work and paint on that level."

In the year Oliver Jackson was born St. Louis was already a "thoroughly apartheid city" in its day-to-day reality. It remained that way until it was jolted into a new, perhaps different reality highlighted by the activism of the late 1950s and early '60's. Yet for Oliver Jackson, St. Louis was always a place "joyful in its difficulties." About his upbringing Jackson recounts, "I liked the people I knew, the African Americans in that place, so much. And it was really marvelous, the gamut of experiences possible with these unique people. I used to go to the museum. In its Forest Park St. Louis at one time offered a

2004, Oil-based pigments, mixed media on canvas, 84 7/8 x 119 3/4 in.



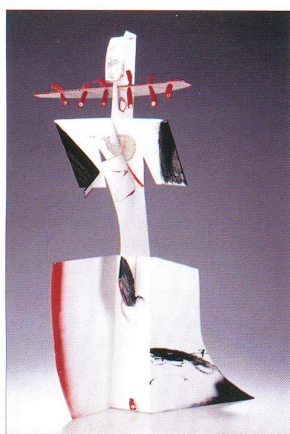
2003, Water-based pigments, mixed media on canvas, 65 x 64 1/2 in.



2003, Water-based pigments, mixed media on canvas, 65 x 65 in.



1985, Marble, steel, mixed media, 88 1/2 h x 44 w x 24 1/2 d
Collection of the San Jose Museum of Art, San Jose, CA



Steel Male Figure,
2004, Steel, enamel, mixed media, 44 in. high



Garden Series III
2000, Oil-based pigments on linen, 108 x 120 in.

ETHING

the art of Oliver Jackson

by Margaret Porter Troupe

great number of cultural possibilities: beautiful places to see flowers and to see animals, the zoo, high opera and also a museum full of European and eventually African art pieces and some American art pieces. It was an extraordinary museum."

In the ensuing years as a young married person with a child, Jackson worked in steel mills, boxcars, drugstores, and factories that made metal signs—"all kinds of jobs that required physical labor." Even after graduate school his employment options were limited in the 1950's, when he was drafted into the Army. During the 1960's, he worked with poet Eugene B. Redmond, the late saxophonist Julius Hemphill, and others in the East St Louis Higher Education community based program, where he had a great growth experience that was, "wonderful but hell at the same time. Wonderful in scale and intensity, the attempt to make something happen for yourself according to your sensibility. And at the same time what it required of you was very challenging and demanding."

Later, after a year teaching literature, philosophy "with a political thrust," and Pan African Studies at Oberlin College in Ohio, Jackson moved to the San Francisco Bay area, settling in Oakland. He had been recruited by the Fine Arts Department at California State University in Sacramento

(from where he has retired) to teach art-making.

Asked about his experience teaching, Jackson responds that teaching for him was an intense and profound effort to present and explain materials to students who he says were resistant, "to become intimate with the world in a sensual way. They didn't want to be physically excited by visual phenomena. They thought that the act of making art is to make a barrier, while the act of art making is to break the barrier." This forced Jackson to commit himself to a higher standard of art-making by developing an intimacy with the work and its magical effects. He has always believed that great art bypasses one's verbal analytical skills and instead, resonates within one's being.

This aesthetic is manifested in a body of work that has earned Oliver Jackson many critical accolades and awards. His art works have been exhibited and collected in major museums and institutions in California and across the United States. He is among the most acclaimed artists in the Bay Area and his seminal influence can be seen in the works of other artists there as well as those who came out of St. Louis such as Michael Marshall, John Rozelle, Dewey Crumpler, Foad Satterfield, and Leslie Price who themselves have become renowned artists and teachers in their own right. 